559*.c.23 c
4
729 f

A LETTER

TO

THE COMMITTEE

FOR RAISING

THE NAVAL PILLAR,

OR

MONUMENT,

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS

THE DUKE OF CLARENCE.

K

BY JOHN FLAXMAN, *SCULPTOR.*

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, JUN. AND W. DAVIES, IN THE STRAND; T. PAYNE, MEWS-GATE; AND R. H. EVANS (SUCCESSOR TO MR. EDWARDS), NO. 26, PALL-MALL;

BY G. WOODFALL, NO. 22, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1799.

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

A LETTER, &c.

MY LORDS, AND GENTLEMEN,

THE taſk you have undertaken of promoting the means for raiſing a National Naval Column, or Monument, is ſo noble in its ſentiment, that it cannot fail to reflect honour upon every individual engaged in it.

BESIDES the ſplendid beginning which has been given to the Subſcription, you have taken the beſt method of ſecuring a deſign equal to the greatneſs of the intention, by inviting all Artiſts, without regard to diſtinction of claſs or deſcription, to ſend in their plans, upon promiſe that the beſt ſhall be rewarded by ſuitable premiums; and ſuch a conduct, at the ſame time that it is likely to bring together whatever is moſt excellent in this kind, that the genius and ſcience of our country can produce, will enſure univerſal applauſe for its liberality and patriotiſm:

AND, indeed, in a work of ſo much national importance, it is abſolutely neceſſary to collect as many good opinions as poſsible, in drawings, words, or writings, from Artiſts, Builders, and Men

of Taſte and Letters, that the aggregate of whatever is beſt in compoſition, deſign, and conſtruction, may be choſen, to prevent the injuries of error, or diſaſter in the execution; and that the work, when completed, may be equal in perfection to the greatneſs of the idea.

In the variety of hints and opinions likely to be laid before you, each of which may contain ſomething uſeful, you will, perhaps, permit an Artiſt, who alſo in the multitude has the honour of his country at heart, to approach you with great reſpect, and offer ſuch remarks and obſervations as have occurred to him upon the ſubject in the ſtudy and practice of his profeſsion: in doing this, it will be neceſſary to take a general view of ſome of the moſt diſtinguiſhed public Monuments of Antiquity, to conſider how far their deſigns might be applicable to the preſent purpoſe, as well as the probable expence of the work.

The Obeliſk deſerves to be noticed firſt, as the ſimpleſt of the Ancient Monuments that has been propoſed for imitation in the preſent caſe; but it is neceſſary, in the imitation of ancient architecture, that its principles and characters ſhould be preſerved, becauſe deviations from them have ſo ſeldom been attended with ſucceſs. The height, then, of the Egyptian Obeliſk is in general about ten times the breadth of its baſe, which being mounted on a pedeſtal and plinth, the whole height could not be leſs than twelve diameters, a proportion much too ſlender for that ſtrength and permanence which the Monument in queſtion ſhould

preſent; beſides, the character of the Obeliſk is ſo ſimple, that no ornament ſeems capable of being harmoniouſly united with it, excepting the Hieroglyphics with which it was charged by the Egyptians *.

The Triumphal Arch has been alſo thought on, which is an idea both elegant and claſsical; but which, however, is liable to two objections:—Firſt, that it cannot well be covered with bas-relieves, repreſenting the engagements it is intended to celebrate like the Ancient Arches, becauſe ſculpture does not repreſent ſhipping with effect, and our great victories are Naval; but chiefly becauſe the Arch, conſiſtently with a beautiful proportion, cannot be raiſed ſufficiently high to make a diſtant ſtately object.

The Column, at the ſame time that it is equal in claſsical authority and beauty to either of the former, has ſeveral advan-

* Obeliſks were dedicated to the Sun by the Egyptians, and their figures intended to repreſent his rays, which accounts for their ſlender proportion.—Pliny, L. 36, C. 8.

All the great Obeliſks in Rome have been thrown down, and moſt of them broken in pieces: thoſe in Egypt and Alexandria have almoſt univerſally ſhared the ſame fate, the natural conſequence of their great height in proportion to the ſmallneſs of their baſes; whilſt the Trajan and Antonine Columns in Rome, and the Pillar of Pompey, or Severus, in Alexandria, remain ſtanding and entire, excepting what the ſecond has ſuffered from fire, and the pedeſtal of the laſt from the Arabs.—Sandy's Travels, P. 115.—Norden, Savary, &c.

tages

tages over them: its form is fitted to become a high and ſtriking diſtant object, like the Obeliſk, with a greater bulk and firmneſs; it is more ſimple than the Arch; and it is, beſides, capable of being ſurmounted, ſurrounded, and defended, by ſuch ſtatues, trophies, and architectural forms, as the Portraits of the Heroes, the Spoils of the Vanquiſhed, and the Records of the National Proweſs, require; thus making one great harmonious and magnificent compoſition.

Other forms to be found in Antiquity might be ſuggeſted; ſuch as the Meta of the Circus, or the figure of a Temple; but the Column is preferable to the former, as being better ſuited to the accompaniment of other architectural forms, and ſculptural explanation; and the latter is liable to the ſame objection with the Triumphal Arch, that, conſiſtently with a beautiful proportion, it cannot be raiſed ſufficiently high to become a very diſtant object. To theſe might be added the Pharos, as a high and diſtinguiſhed object of claſsical authority, although it does not ſeem preferable either for beauty or utility, ſuppoſing it to be erected in or near London *.

But there is one ſpecies of public Monument which deſerves a more particular attention, becauſe in it the illuſtrious Ancients exhibited ſuch magnificence, power, and ſkill, as in the relation only muſt continue to delight and ſurprize ſucceeding ages; this ſpecies is of the Coloſſal Statues. We are aſtoniſhed when Pliny, ſpeaking of theſe ſtatues, ſays there were an hundred

* See Plate III.

of them in the city of Rhodes, each of which ennobled the place where it ſtood *.——In the accounts given by the Ancients of theſe works, we are particularly ſtruck with the bronze Jupiter, of ſixty feet high, by Lyſippus, which ſtood before the Theatre of Pompey in Rome, which is mentioned at the head of thoſe ſeveral ſtatues, equal to towers, at that time exiſting in the city †. The Jupiter, made of ivory and gold, by Phidias, for the Temple of Elis, which as he ſat was ſixty feet high; and, conſequently, had he ſtood, muſt have been upwards of ſeventy-two feet ‡: the Minerva of the Athenian Acropolis, likewiſe made of ivory and gold, which held a ſtatue of Victory, ſix feet high, in her hand ‖: but, above all, the braſs Coloſſus of Rhodes, one hundred and five feet high §. It is not to be wondered at that the Ancients beſtowed their money and labour ſo liberally upon theſe public ſtatues, conſidering how much more ſentiment and intereſt there is in a fine human figure than can poſsibly be produced in the choiceſt piece of Architecture, and eſpecially when that figure repreſents the protecting Power or Genius of the Country.

It naturally occurs in this place, that from the two laſt-mentioned works, hints might be taken for a public Monument, perhaps the propereſt that could be offered. A ſtatue might be raiſed like the Minerva in the Athenian citadel, whoſe aſpect and

* Pliny, L. 34, C. 7. † Pliny, ibidem. ‡ Pauſanias, L. 5.
‖ Stuart's Athens, Vol. III. P. 13. Strabo, L. 8.
§ Philo Byzantius. Pliny, L. 34, C. 17.

ſize

ſize ſhould repreſent the Genius of the Empire: its magnitude ſhould equal the Coloſſus of Rhodes; its character ſhould be Britannia Triumphant; it ſhould be mounted on a ſuitable pedeſtal and baſement; the pedeſtal might be decorated with the Heroes and Trophies of the Country, and the Hiſtory of its Proweſs inſcribed upon the baſement. The whole work might be raiſed to the height required, two hundred and thirty feet, and preſent the nobleſt Monument of National Glory in the world *.

It is to be expected that ſome may be ſtartled at the propoſition before them, on account of its magnitude and novelty; and, indeed, it ſhould be well conſidered before it is aſſented to. In order to do this, it will be neceſſary to examine the ſubject in every eſſential point of view; but here it may be ſaid in defence of what has been propoſed, that deſigns for a National Monument two hundred and thirty feet high have been required by public advertiſement: here, then, is a deſign of that height, that a Coloſſal ſtatue may be built by the ſame kind of labour, and with the ſame durability, as a Column, with its proper accompaniments and decorations; and perhaps, in the end, would not be more expenſive.

But it may be the opinion of many well-diſpoſed perſons, that as ſuch a work muſt be expenſive, and conſequently burthenſome to the country, it would be more to the general advantage for it to be laid aſide; and, notwithſtanding this opinion militates equally againſt the coſt of every proper deſign, yet ſo benevolent

* See the Frontiſpiece.

a ſenti-

a ſentiment ought to be treated with due reſpect; and if it ſhould appear that it would be an oppreſsive expence, the intention ſhould be given up by all means; nay, if it were not the wiſh and deſire of the people at large, it would be unjuſt to burthen them with a work for which they had no inclination, and in which they took no intereſt. But, to enable us to form a clearer judgment on this ſubject, we ſhould take a view of the motives to engage the nation in ſuch an undertaking, and the means by which it might be executed.

We may ſtate, then, that Great Britain having increaſed its dominion by ſea and land, taken together, to as great an extent as the Roman Empire at its utmoſt height; poſſeſsing a proportionate commerce, having conquered all enemies at ſea in a ſeries of unequalled victories, and controuling the fate of great part of the globe by its power, is deſirous to raiſe a National Monument of ſuch extraordinary ſucceſs, proſperity, and favour of Divine Providence. Such a work ſhould be worthy the grandeur of the country, and the mighty objects it is intended to perpetuate; it ſhould be a decided proof of the excellence of our Artiſts, the ſkill of our Mechanics and Builders, and in all reſpects a laſting memorial of the Magnanimity, Virtue, and Wiſdom of the Country.

Having generally conſidered the character and dignity of the work, it will be proper to turn our thoughts to the expence and means of raiſing it; and here we may remark, that the Monument now in contemplation will be liable to a very general compariſon,

both in deſign and expence, with the London Column in Grace-church-ſtreet, which was raiſed upwards of one hundred years ago, at the expence of £14,500, to perpetuate the memory of the Great Fire in 1666. Now the ſum of £14,500, about the year 1670, conſidering the increaſed value of labour and materials, would be equal to double that ſum at preſent; ſo that the coſt of the London Column was not leſs than the value, £29,000 or £30,000 of our money, raiſed from the miſerable wrecks of fortune left by one of the moſt dire calamities that had ever afflicted the inhabitants of this country! Surely the ſpirit of the Nation will feel that a Memorial of the great and ſingular bleſsings it enjoys, its wealth, its power, and unrivalled naval proweſs; neither ſhould, nor could be raiſed at the ſame expence as was extracted from wretchedneſs, to perpetuate the remembrance of calamity. When we think of the time this country has been engaged in the preſent ſtruggle, the blood and treaſure it has expended; when we remember the incalculable advantages it has gained, can it be ſuppoſed that a Monument of leſs than double the expence of the London Column ſhould be raiſed, to celebrate and perpetuate ſuch exertions and advantages? If the motives for undertaking ſuch a work were ſtated, and prints circulated throughout the country of a noble and beautiful deſign, it is likely that a very great number of perſons would receive as much gratification from giving ſmall ſubſcriptions to raiſe the work, as they would in giving like ſums to ſee a play, or any other public exhibition. Now 200,000 ſubſcriptions of 5s. each make £50,000, or a million of ſhillings amount to the ſame ſum; and if Government could be

prevailed on to give the tranſport of the marble with which this country abounds for the work, it would be a great aſsiſtance. The ſum propoſed might be raiſed in ſix or ſeven years to ſupply the work in its progreſs: for ſuch a ſum, a Monument, creditable to the country, might be raiſed, and ſuch a one as would ſtand the teſt of ages, for which purpoſe a ſum very inferior to the above-mentioned would be inſufficient *.

MY LORDS, AND GENTLEMEN,

WHATEVER motives of ambition or intereſt may influence myſelf, or any of my brother Artiſts, on the preſent occaſion, either in our deſigns or opinions, who ſhall be elated with ſucceſs, or who chagrined by diſappointment, muſt be matter of total indifference to the country at large; and, indeed, the viciſsitude of human affairs, and the duration of life, muſt in a ſhort time make the iſſue of the conteſt of very ſmall moment even to the contending parties themſelves: but the country cannot be equally indifferent about the choice of a deſign, for upon that muſt depend whether the work will be a national honour, or a national diſgrace. It is a work intended to laſt as long as the Trajan Column, the Amphitheatres, or the Pyramids of Egypt; and

* The pariſhes being 1200 in the kingdom, the money might, perhaps, be raiſed by parochial ſubſcription or collection, in a manner neither burthenſome nor diſagreeable.

therefore impartial poſterity will paſs judgment upon it. If it is greatly conceived, and executed in a manner worthy of the grandeur and power of the country, it will enſure the praiſe and admiration of ſucceeding ages; but it would certainly be far better not to raiſe any National Monument whatever on the preſent occaſion, than one upon which conſiderable labour and expence ſhould be laid out, to be the ſcoff of foreigners, and the diſgrace of the country as long as it ſhould exiſt.

As all Britiſh Artiſts were called on by public advertiſement to exert themſelves on this occaſion in the general cauſe, I thought duty obliged me, in common with others, to ſend a deſign; and as I was perſonally known to ſcarcely any of the Committee, I have taken the liberty, with reſpect and humility, to addreſs ſuch of my motives and opinions as ſeemed neceſſary to the explanation of my deſign, in this manner. I ſhall conclude with the wiſh, not that my own deſign may be choſen, but that the beſt, by whomſoever offered, may be determined on, and that the execution may render immortal honour to the country.

I have the honour to remain,

My Lords and Gentlemen,

Your moſt obedient Servant,

JOHN FLAXMAN.

Buckingham-Street, Fitzroy-Square.

P. S.—

P. S.—The ſummit of Greenwich Hill appears to be the beſt ſituation for the Naval Monument, from the following conſiderations: the gradation of ſcenery from the Thames, riſing with the fine architecture and porticos of this great Naval Hoſpital of the country, continued with the high ground and woods, and connected by the Obſervatory, with ſuch a finiſh would afford a ſublimity of proſpect not to be equalled in any other place. Beſides, its vicinity to and viſibility in the high parts of London and its environs, to the ſouth and eaſt it would moſt likely be ſeen as far as the ſea. It is alſo to be remembered, that the port of the Metropolis is the great port of the whole kingdom; that the Kent road is the ingreſs to London from Europe, Aſia, and Africa; and that, as Greenwich Hill is the place from whence the longitude is taken, the Monument would, like the firſt Mile-ſtone in the city of Rome, be the point from which the world would be meaſured *.

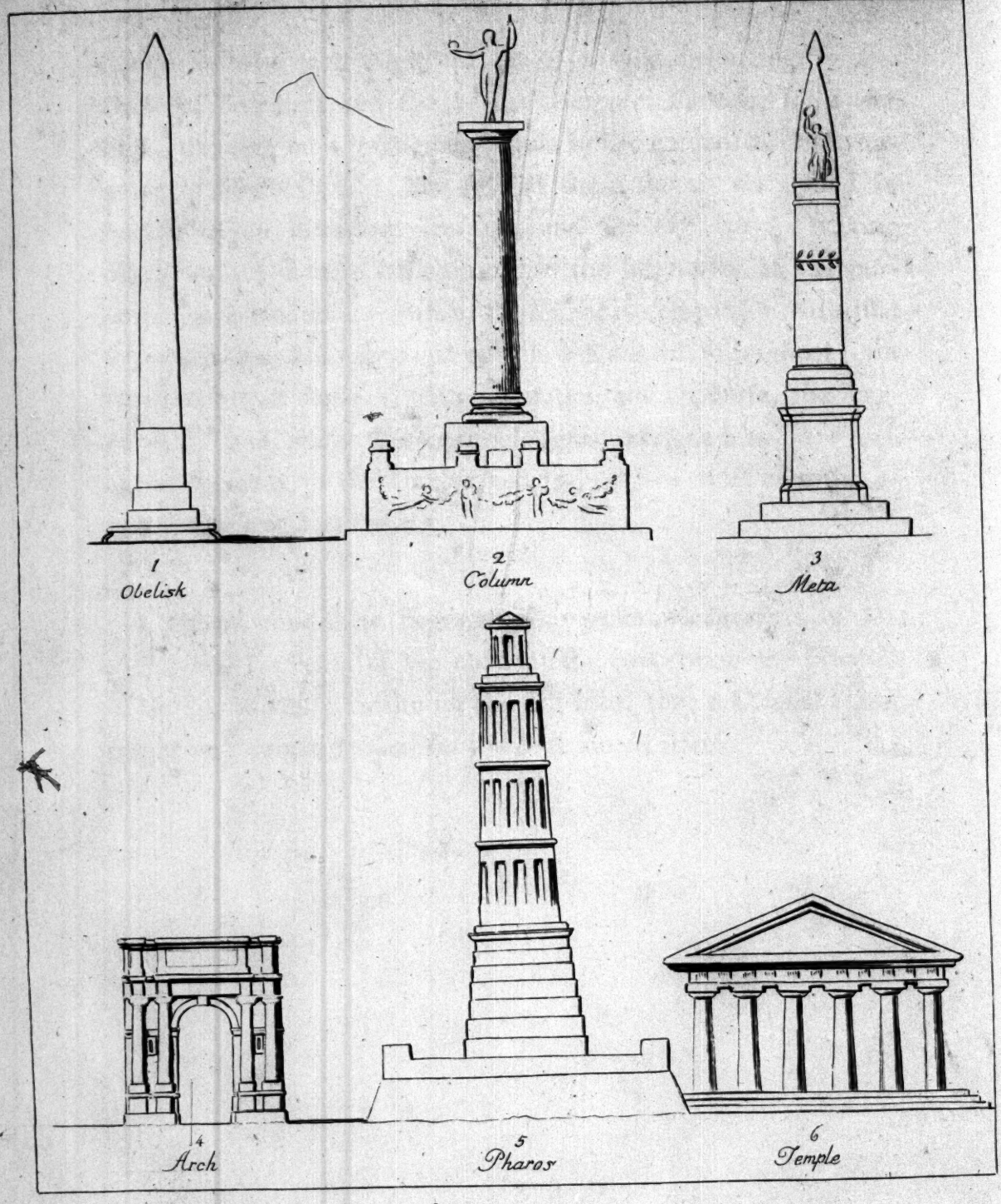
Note.—Beſides the accounts of Coloſſal ſtatues given by the ancient authors ſufficient to fill a volume, and of which ſtupendous remains are ſtill to be ſeen in Egypt and Italy, magnificent works of this kind have been produced in the two laſt centuries: ſuch are the figure of St. Charles Boromæus, of beaten braſs, ſixty-eight feet high, on a pedeſtal forty-eight feet ten inches Engliſh meaſure, raiſed by the Boromæan Family in one of the iſlands of the ſame name in the Milaneſe; the ſtatue of the Pyranees, built of

* See Plate II.

ſtone,

ſtone, ſeventy feet high, at Prato, a villa belonging to the Duke of Tuſcany; and the bronze Hercules Farneſe, forty feet high, ſtanding on a prodigious cupola in the gardens of the Landgrave of Heſſe Caſſal. The firſt of theſe ſtatues was raiſed in honour of an illuſtrious kinſman, and the two laſt for ſtriking objects only. At the ſame time that the inferiority of the purpoſes above-mentioned muſt be confeſſed, in compariſon with that for which it is now propoſed to raiſe a National Monument; yet every one muſt conſider, with admiration and applauſe, the magnanimity and public ſpirit of thoſe great perſons who gave ſuch encouragement to the Genius and Induſtry of their country, to gratify the world at large.

I SHALL cloſe theſe pages with my acknowledgments to Mr. G. DANCE for ſome of the obſervations concerning the ſituation of the Monument; as alſo for the firſt hint, that a Coloſſal Statue might be a proper ſubject for the Monument itſelf.



1
Obelisk

2
Column

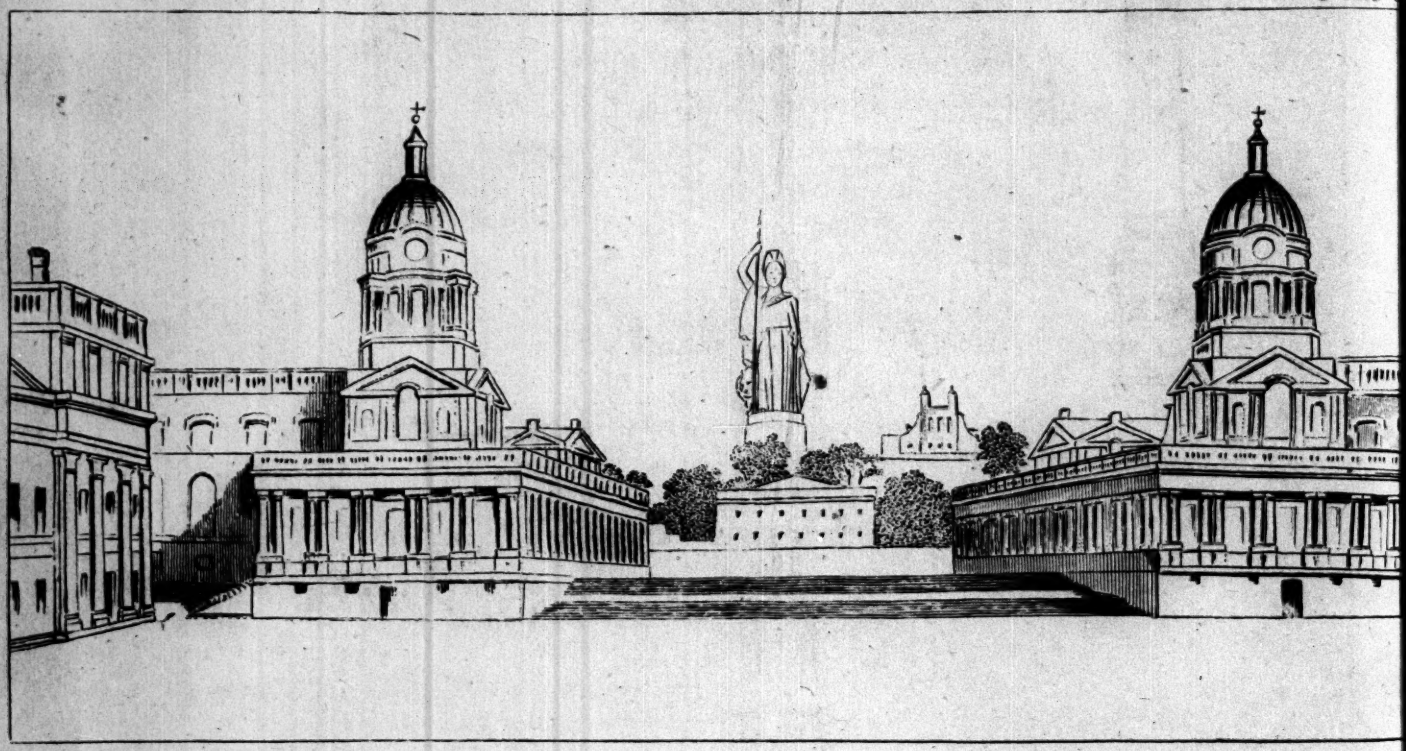
3
Meta

4
Arch

5
Pharos

6
Temple

Plate



A View of Greenwich Hospital with the Statue of Britannia on the Hil

EXPLANATION OF THE PLATES.

FRONTISPIECE.

STATUE of Britannia Triumphant, with its pedeſtal and baſement, 230 feet high; the pedeſtal decorated with the Portraits of His Majeſty, and the Naval Heroes, Howe, St. Vincent, Duncan, Nelſon, &c. with Wreaths of Laurel on the altars, at the corners of the baſement, to contain the names of Captains, &c.

PLATE II.

A View of Greenwich Hoſpital, with the Statue of Britannia on the hill.

PLATE III.

1. The Egyptian Obeliſk, from Stuart's Obeliſk of the Sun.
2. A Column in honour of Antoninus Pius, from a Conſecration Medal of that Emperor; poſſibly a firſt thought for the Column of the ſame name now exiſting in Rome.
3. The Meta of the Circus—Piraneſi's baſes, Plate 14.
4. The Arch of Titus—Bartoli's Triumphal Arches.
5. The Pharos, or Light-houſe, of Alexandria, from Smeaton's Preface to the Eddiſtone Light-houſe.
6. One of the Temples of Pæſtum.

Printed by G. Woodfall, No. 22, Paternoſter-Row, London.

EXPLANATION OF THE PLATES.

FRONTISPIECE.

STATUE of Britannia Triumphant, with its pedestal and basement, 230 feet high; the pedestal decorated with the Portraits of His Majesty, and the Naval Heroes, Howe, St. Vincent, Duncan, Nelson, &c. with Wreaths of Laurel on the Altars, at the corners of the basement, to contain the names of Captains, &c.

PLATE II.

A View of Greenwich Hospital, with distant view of Britannia on the hill.

PLATE III.

1. The Egyptian Obelisk, from Smaris's Obelisk of the Sun.
2. A Column in honour of Antonius Pius, from a Conjecturion Medal of that Emperor; possibly a first thought for the Column of the Barricade now existing in Rome.
3. The Mew of the Circus—Piranesi's Italie, Plate 14.
4. The Arch of Titus—Bartoli's Triumphal Arches.
5. The Pharos, or Light-house, of Alexandria, from Smeaton's Preface to the Eddistone Light-house.
6. One of the Temples of Paestum.

Printed by C. Wright, No. 22, Paternoster-Row, London.